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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004140

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: HOUSE QUASHES IMPEACHMENT EFFORT

REF: A. OPS CENTER - MANILA 09/06/2005 TELCON

[1](#)B. MANILA 4040

[1](#)C. MANILA 4019

[1](#)D. MANILA 3994

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Philippine House of Representatives has quashed the Opposition's impeachment effort against President Arroyo. In a session concluding late September 6, the vote in the House to uphold the Justice Committee's findings dismissing the complaints against Arroyo was 158 for and 51 against with four abstentions. The Opposition, conceding defeat in the House, has announced that it now plans to focus on holding street demonstrations against the government. As of late September 6, an Opposition rally involving several thousand people is taking place near Congress in Quezon City, metro Manila. No violence has been reported. The Opposition is very frustrated that its impeachment effort is over. Most neutral observers believe, however, that the public at large is not similarly engaged and probably will not turn out for rallies in large numbers. End Summary.

End of Road for Impeachment Effort

[1](#)2. (U) Meeting in plenary session, the House of Representatives has quashed the Opposition's impeachment effort. In a session concluding late September 6, the vote in the House to uphold the Justice Committee's findings dismissing the complaints against Arroyo was 158 for and 51 against with four abstentions. (Note: Last week, the Justice Committee dismissed two complaints -- including the Opposition's comprehensive complaint -- on technical grounds. Another complaint was dismissed because it used evidence that was ruled out of order -- see refs b-d. End Note.) The voting, which was televised, moved at a glacial pace as each member went to the well of the House, made a statement and then voted. By only winding up with 51 votes, the Opposition did not achieve the 79 or more (one-third of the House membership) endorsements needed to send the matter to the Senate for an impeachment trial.

[1](#)3. (U) The debate on the Justice Committee findings began on September 5. The texture of the debate basically mirrored the discussions that took place in the Justice Committee in recent weeks. Pro-Arroyo lawmakers, who are dominant in the House, used their speeches to defend the President and to lash out at the Opposition for what they characterized as "reckless charges." Opposition members accused the pro-Arroyo Majority of "stifling discussion" and "trying to protect a corrupt president from justice." The Opposition also claimed that Malacanang Palace was bribing lawmakers to ensure that they did not break ranks and support the impeachment effort. Assistants to President Arroyo have vigorously denied the charges and asked that the Opposition respect the House's decision to end the impeachment debate.

Opposition Rally

[1](#)4. (U) The Opposition has conceded defeat in its impeachment effort. Representative Francis Escudero, the House Minority Leader, stated late September 5 that "We may have lost by not having the 79 signatures, but this does not mean that Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has won. The search for truth is not yet over." Escudero promised that anti-Arroyo groups would take their complaints against Arroyo to the streets via a new round of demonstrations and rallies. Opposition leaders announced recently that they were forming a new group called "Bukluran Para sa Katotohanan" (Tagalog for "Coalition for the Truth"), which would help spearhead these rallies. Former president Corazon Aquino, Susan Roces (a well-known former actress and the widow of deceased presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr.) and other well-known Opposition figures have announced their support for the group.

[1](#)5. (SBU) As of late September 6, an Opposition rally is taking place in Quezon City in the metro Manila area. So

far, no violence has been reported as the estimated 3-4,000 or so participants rally near Congress. Most of the crowd appears to have links with pro-left groups, according to Pol FSN who is monitoring the scene. Students and elements of the mainstream Opposition are also present. Supporters of Brother Eddie Valenzuela's "Jesus is Lord" group are in evidence (Brother Eddie, a former presidential candidate, is another pro-Opposition figure). Corazon Aquino, Susan Roces and Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson are leading the rally. In addition to Brother Eddie, a number of clerics from other faiths are also participating.

Comment

16. (C) After the Justice Committee's several votes last week, the September 5-6 events in the House have been expected and were rather anti-climactic. At this point, Arroyo has the political edge over her opponents, but a sour mood prevails. While it basically knew that a negative result in the full House vote was forthcoming, there is no doubt that the Opposition is very frustrated that its impeachment effort is over. Opposition leaders have made clear that the political turbulence is far from finished and have promised to continue their campaign against Arroyo. Despite the Opposition's best efforts, however, most neutral observers believe that the public at large is not engaged and probably will not turn out for rallies in large numbers.

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JOHNSON